

Cosmic Symphony

Cosmic Symphony

The Early and Later Poems
of
Bhai Vir Singh

Translated by
Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh



Sahitya Akademi

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	x
<i>Introduction</i>	xi

DEW DROPS

Trel Tupke

vision (<i>Didar</i>)	3
Eyes (<i>Ankhian</i>)	4
Smitten (<i>Lagian</i>)	5
Sundered Eyes (<i>Vichurian Ankhian</i>)	6
Dew and Sun (<i>Trel Te Suraj</i>)	7
My Beloved (<i>Mainda Piara</i>)	8
Preparations (<i>Tyarian</i>)	9
Vice (<i>Badi</i>)	10
Still Ranjha (<i>Achal Ranjha</i>)	11
Immortal Drink (<i>Amar Rasa</i>)	12
Alchemist or Honeybee? (<i>Pasari Ki Makhir</i>)	13
To The One Who Plucks The Rose (<i>Gulab Da Phul Toran Wale Nun</i>)	14
Cognition-Inebriation (<i>Hosh-Masti</i>)	15
Devotion (<i>Maganta</i>)	16
Obstinacy-Ecstasy (<i>Hath-Rasa</i>)	17
Possessed (<i>Be Khudi</i>)	18
Higher Wisdom (<i>Ucchi Mati</i>)	19
Encaged Bird (<i>Pinjare Pia Panchi</i>)	20
Today (<i>Ajjo</i>)	21
Struck Forever (<i>Laggian Nibhan</i>)	22
In Fear (<i>Bhae Vic</i>)	23
Facing The Water Flow (<i>Raun Rukh</i>)	24
Memory (<i>Yad</i>)	25
Knowledge, Addiction (<i>Ile, Amal</i>)	26

Contents

Addict-Abstainer (<i>Amlī-Sophī</i>)	27
Music (<i>Sangeet</i>)	28
Parting-Meeting (<i>Vichora-Vasal</i>)	29
Tree (<i>Brichh</i>)	30
Beyond-Time (<i>La-Maka</i>)	31
Lofty Vistas (<i>Ucchi Nazar</i>)	32
Double Gaze (<i>Duvalli Jhak</i>)	33
Didn't Cross The Limits (<i>Haddon Par Na Hoeē</i>)	34
Somehow Not Caught (<i>Kiven Na Fadinda</i>)	35
Rhythm of the Melody (<i>Rag Di Sur</i>)	36
Wherever I See There Is My Beloved (<i>Jitt Wal Nazar Utte Wal Sajjan</i>)	37
Looking Towards The Skies (<i>Arshan Wal Nazar</i>)	38
Name, Devotion, Will (<i>Nam, Dhyan, Raza</i>)	39
Illumination (<i>Sinyan</i>)	40
I Am Sad To See The World Suffer (<i>Dard Dekh Dukh Anda</i>)	41
Blessings And Actions (<i>Bakhshish Te Karam</i>)	42
Slave or Master? (<i>Barda Ki Malik?</i>)	43
Exulting Self (<i>Ape Da Uchal</i>)	44
Roshan Ara - From Her Grave)	45
<i>Roshan Ara</i> -(<i>Samadh Chon</i>)	
Roshanara To The Visitors (<i>Roshanara Yatrian Nun</i>)	46
A Deathless Tomb In Delhi (<i>Dilli Di Ikk Benisha Samadhi</i>)	47
The Self Inside (<i>Ape Wich Apa</i>)	48
Jeweller (<i>Jauhari</i>)	49
Bondage-Liberty (<i>Band-Khalasi</i>)	50

MY BELOVED

Mere Sainyan Jio

Introduction (<i>Prarambh</i>)	53
A Hearty Welcome! (<i>Jio Aiyān Nun</i>)	54
Stay Smoothly Spread (<i>Vicchia Rahu</i>)	55

Contents

Homage to Your Magical Wonders (<i>Sadke Teri Jadugari De</i>)	56
Struck By Desire (<i>Lagg Gaisi Bali Umare</i>)	57
Priceless Gift (<i>Vadmulli Dat</i>)	59
The Bamboo Basket (<i>Vans Di Tori</i>)	61
Joy, Enjoyer, Enjoyment (<i>Ras, Rasia, Rasal</i>)	62
Meeting Time (<i>Mil Vela Uu</i>)	63
I Myself Go To Their Door (<i>Janda Ap Han Uhna De Duar</i>)	64
Presence (<i>Hazuri</i>)	66
Recognition of My Beloved (<i>Sainyan Ji Di Sian</i>)	67
In The Tiny Lap (<i>Nikki God Vich</i>)	69
Yes Will Meet For Sure (<i>Milso, Han, Milso Zarur</i>)	70
No Room For Words (<i>Bolan Da Nahion Tan</i>)	72
Beloved's Land (<i>Saiyan Da Desh</i>)	73
Well Done! (<i>Shabash!</i>)	74
Inner Eyes (<i>Andarle Nain</i>)	75
Pot (<i>Taula</i>)	76
Loneliness (<i>Ikkal</i>)	77
Evening and Morning on the Go (<i>Turdi Sanjh Saver</i>)	78
Spring (<i>Bahar</i>)	79
A Fleeting Instant (<i>Chinn</i>)	81
Waking Up From This Sleep (<i>Jagi Jan Es Nindon</i>)	82
My Message (<i>Mera Sandesh</i>)	83
Sign (<i>Sainat</i>)	84
Disclosure of Love (<i>Preet Di Ugarh</i>)	85
My Crisis (<i>Meri Mushkal</i>)	86
You Planted This Sapling (<i>Tuhon Buti Eh Lai Si</i>)	87
Swoop of the Swan (<i>Hans Pheri</i>)	88
Where Are You? (<i>Kitthe Ho?</i>)	90
Such Nights (<i>Essian Ratan</i>)	91
Misery and Pain Down The Memory Lane (<i>Dukh Andoh Gae Sabh Bhul</i>)	92
At the Still Point (<i>Ruk Jaye Kal Chal</i>)	93

Contents

Love for the Ephemeral (<i>Binashar Da Prem</i>)	94
Wedded (<i>Larh Laggi</i>)	95
Unflinching Eyes (<i>Attik Nain</i>)	96
How to go Across? (<i>Dur Kinj Hoe Duri?</i>)	97
Mashobra – In Autumn (<i>Mashobra – Khiza Vicc</i>)	98
Winter-Sun in Mashobra (<i>Mashobre Di Sial-Dhup</i>)	99
Hands to Works, Voice to Recite (<i>Hath Kar Vall, Rasna Uchar Vall</i>)	100
Your Magical Wonders (<i>Tere Chojan Di Chal</i>)	104
Curdled Bit (<i>Chiddi</i>)	105
Exchange of Hearts (<i>Dil Vatandra</i>)	106
I Am Getting My Oars (<i>Mere Chappe Lagg Rahe Han</i>)	107
Keru Mountain (<i>Keru Paharh</i>)	109
Entirely My Beloved's (<i>Sainyan Di Sari</i>)	110
Blurry (<i>Jhanwla</i>)	111
Heart's Desire (<i>Dil Saddhar</i>)	112
Tremors of Love (<i>Pyar-Tarban</i>)	113
All of a Sudden (<i>Chan Achkian</i>)	114
Again and Again I Return (<i>Murh Murh Phere Pandian</i>)	115
Lines of Love-Sickness (<i>Birhon Lekh</i>)	116
Your Nest (<i>Tera Ashiyana</i>)	117
Pull (<i>Khicch</i>)	118
Don't Walk Away (<i>Tur Jao na</i>)	119
Invisible Camel (<i>Ojal Dachi</i>)	120
Don't Hide (<i>Na Chappia Kar</i>)	121
Writng (<i>Tarfan</i>)	122
Reality (<i>Asliat</i>)	125
Request (<i>Ardas</i>)	126
Amorphous Rock (<i>Bitthun Patthar</i>)	127
Diamond-Speck (<i>Heera-Kani</i>)	129
Guess Who? (<i>Bujho Eh Kaun?</i>)	130
Unmusical Music (<i>An-Sangeetak Sangeet</i>)	131

Contents

Instant Flash (<i>Acchan Ceti Da Jhalka</i>)	132
Wild Berries (<i>Kokan Ber</i>)	133
From Beauty Into Beauty (<i>Sundarta Ton Sundarta Vic</i>)	135
Rapturous Hint (<i>Sukh Sainat</i>)	136
Flow of a Still Heart (<i>Dhara Dil Tike Vali</i>)	137
Aura of Your Visit (<i>Phera Pa Jan Di Prabha</i>)	139
The Ambrosial Cup (<i>Nam Pyala</i>)	144

Preface

June 10, 2007 marks the 50th death anniversary of Bhai Vir Singh, and this book is my attempt to pay tribute to him. I am very grateful to Colby College for giving me the sabbatical, and to thank the Sahitya Akademi for publishing a work that has been extremely meaningful for me. My special thanks to its Deputy Secretary Gitanjali for all her interest and support. Thanks to Dr. Mohinder Singh, Director of the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, for hosting my lectures over the years -- the opportunity of being with the family and friends of Bhai Vir Singh has been inspirational for me. Thanks to Sharan Aunty for her love that comes to me in Punjabi across the oceans. And thanks to Bira, Harry and Sarah who in their own different ways help me stay in touch with my inner being where I get to hear those poetic melodies in my mother tongue.

I am profoundly grateful to my father Professor Harbans Singh for exposing me to the great poet. Actually I was quite young when he was doing a book on Bhai Vir Singh for the Sahitya Akademi. We were on our summer holiday in Dehra Dun. My father invariably 'dictated' the first draft of all his books, essays, letters and countless entries, which he would then revise over and over! Since he did not have access to his official secretary in Dehra Dun, I was apprenticed -- rather unwillingly on my part -- but something of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry and my father's devotion to Punjabi literature seeped into my psyche. Years later, and miles away from the Punjab, my spirit draws upon that rich reservoir -- all that I lost comes back to life when I read his verse. There are other links with Bhai Vir Singh as well, which make him an extra special figure for me. His younger brother Dr. Balbir Singh and his niece Dr. Mohinder Kaur were very good family friends, and we shared delightful times both at their home in Dehra Dun and at ours in Patiala. When my brother got married, Dr. Balbir Singh graciously presented him with the pen used by Bhai Vir Singh. I am proud that the Sahitya Akademi has given me this venue to share the flow of his pen with a wide audience.

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Introduction

After twenty years of teaching at Colby College, I took my first full year sabbatical and indulged myself by translating Bhai Vir Singh's poems. And what a wonderful experience it has been! Any poem I would enter, would seem like diving into an unplumbed ocean – where vibrant scenes, elemental sounds, sensuous tastes, sensations and smells churned out of its primordial waters leapt me far up into the boundless skies. How could a tiny lyric have such cosmic force? The poet must have profoundly felt the vibrations of the universe, and somehow, through his artistic talents, gathered them in such a way that made it possible for his readers to hear them. This book is my attempt to make that cosmic symphony available to the English speaking public.

Bhai Vir Singh is known as a 'maker of modern Punjabi literature'. Poet, novelist, editor, exegete, historian and journalist, he was the leading figure in the Singh Sabha, the dynamic Sikh renaissance movement which aspired to revive Punjabi culture. He was born on December 5, 1872 in Amritsar, within a rapidly changing social and cultural milieu. The Sikh kingdom established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been lost in 1849, and the Punjab had become part of the British dominion. As Western education and ideology began to circulate over the land of the five rivers, strong currents of both reform and transformation came into play. The Christian missionary activity further raised self-awareness amongst the people. Ironically, westernisation brought about the development of indigenous cultural traditions and the vernacular Punjabi language. Bhai Vir Singh profoundly participated in the exciting cross-currents of modernity and tradition: he attended the Church Mission School, he read English writers and philosophers, he absorbed Western ideas, he broke away from the constricting classical structures and tropes. Simultaneously, he learnt Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit; he went back to his own Indian roots, to his legendary protagonists Heer and Ranjha, to his Sikh heritage and to his mother tongue Punjabi. His literary production is voluminous, and includes eight collections of poetry, four novels, a play, five biographies and numerous texts that he meticulously annotated and commented upon. In different genres he tries to awaken his community to their own past with fresh and innovative insights. He set up a printing press, and even started a weekly newspaper,

Introduction

the *Khalsa Samachar*, which is still in circulation. Punjabi was his medium, for he understood the powerful link between culture and language, and firmly believed that in order to change the consciousness of his people, he had to communicate with them in their tongue. Bhai Vir Singh's versatile genius modernised the Punjabi language and gave a new life to it as a literary medium. For a detailed discussion of his life and works, and his impact on Punjabi literature, see Professor Harbans Singh's excellent volumes in the Sahitya Akademi Series

Bhai Vir Singh is also known as a 'poet of the Sikhs'. He was born in a family steeped in Sikhism. Both his maternal and paternal grandfathers were scholars of Sikh sacred literature. In fact Giani Hazara Singh (maternal side) was a direct descendant of the influential line of exegetes from the time of the tenth Sikh Guru. Giani Hazara Singh was also an inspector of schools in the Church system and prepared some school textbooks in Punjabi by translating Urdu classics. Little Vir Singh who spent a lot of time with his grandfather questioned him one day as to why he only translated other people's books and did not write his own! No wonder, when he grew up, Vir Singh took up creative writing and wrote volumes and volumes to underscore the metaphysical ideals and ethical values of his Sikh faith. When he was a teenager, he wrote his first novel *Sundari* – actually the first in the Punjabi language. In the novel, Sikh ethical principles are concretely embodied in its strong and virtuous heroine. Similarly, his epic *Rana Surat Singh* (modelled on Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and longer than 12,000 lines!) presents the quintessence of Sikh mysticism through its female protagonist Rani Raj Kaur. Bhai Vir Singh wrote several biographies on the life of the Sikh Gurus, and a play *Raja Lakhdata Singh*, which again elucidates Sikh principles. Late in his career, he wrote a formal commentary on the Guru Granth, the Sikh sacred text, which was published posthumously in several large volumes. Furthermore, he revised the *Guru Granth Kosh*, a dictionary of Sikh scripture, which explains important terms and allusions in great detail. The dominant strand underlying his prodigious output was his use of poetic strategy to evoke, elucidate and expand the Sikh scriptural message. Poetically, Bhai Vir Singh grasped the Guru Granth, and made it diaphanous and alive for his readers. The Sikh poet is a glass (to use Emerson's analogy) through which later generations can see Sikh scripture in all its richness.

Introduction

In my previous works, I have explored Bhai Vir Singh's usage of artistic strategy to evoke, elucidate and expand Sikh theological and ethical concepts.

At this point, however, I wish to see Bhai Vir Singh simply as a poet. As Aristotle said, poetry is concerned with the universals and so I feel we must not limit the poetic legacy of Bhai Vir Singh to the Sikhs. Its universal notes reach out to all of us across religions and continents. In this volume, entitled *Cosmic Symphony: The Early and Later Poems of Bhai Vir Singh*, I have translated two of his poetic works – *Trel Tupke AND Mere Sainyan Jio*. Though poetry was the blood throbbing in his veins constantly, these two texts mark the beginning and the culmination of Bhai Vir Singh's poetic development. *Trel Tupke* is renowned as his first collection of lyric poems. Written after 1909, it was first published in 1922 and brought out as part of the collection *Lehran de Har (Garlands of Waves)* in 1928. The collections *Matak Hulare*, *Bijlian de Har*, *Preet Veena AND Kant Maheli* followed in quick succession. An anthology of songs in praise of the Sikh Gurus was published in 1933 under the title of *Kambdi Kalai (The Trembling Wrist)*. *Mere Sainyan Jio (My Beloved)* in 1953 was the last collection of verse that Bhai Vir Singh published.

The style of the short poem that we find in *Trel Tupke AND Mere Sainyan Jio* was an innovation in Punjabi literature and became popular instantly, gaining a large audience outside the religious circle. While ushering new and quicker lyric tunes and measures into Punjabi prosody, the short poem introduced new words and images as well. Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Keats had their impact, and the new form brought about a revolutionary transformation in Punjabi poetry. Sadly, in spite of his phenomenal inspiration and the intrinsic beauty of his verse, I am amazed that much of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry is not available to the English speaking public. We have a few extracts from his poems, but no poetic book in its entirety. Even a work like *Mere Sainyan Jio*, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955, has not received a complete English translation till this present work.

The task of translating his powerful verse from the original Punjabi into English is of course daunting. We all know Robert Frost's dictum, 'poetry is what is lost in translation'. A translation cannot ever replace

Introduction

the original. Indeed it is a challenge to transmit the aesthetic efficacy of taste from one tongue to another. Even eminent scholars who have translated Bhai Vir Singh's poems acknowledge that their translations are not literal but rather 'transcreations'

The renderings are not all literal but, in a sense, are 'transcreations'. In view of the wide gap between the principles of expression in the Punjabi and English languages, in some places lines have been, so to say, 'telescoped' and the essence rather than the detailed expanse of the poet's theme attempted. This has sometimes been rendered particularly necessary by the poet's tendency towards prolixity. A more detailed rendering would perhaps be found to lose point and significance in English.²

I, to the contrary, found his colloquial style refreshingly familiar, and therefore relatively easy to translate. It seems to me that if we try to stay as close as possible to the original verse, and follow its movements, rhythms and syntax, Bhai Vir Singh's Punjabi verse lends itself quite well to English. In fact in this instance Walter Benjamin's thesis that 'Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express' rings true.³

It is however absolutely necessary that the translator sincerely respect both languages – *equally*. Without the essential parity between the original and the receptor languages, we cannot have any meaningful translations. As Pannwitz remarks, 'Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works'.⁴ Indeed, the imperial English language with its own set of meanings, connotations and structures has dominated our *globtrtinised* world, and in the process of translation, a language like Punjabi has been totally subservient to His Master's Voice. But with a genuine regard for both languages, the translation from the text to the adaptation follows accurately and smoothly without much tension. Punjabi and English may be from different cultural, temporal and geographical contexts, but when a translator approaches them as equal and parallel entities, they affirm each other, voice each other, enrich each other and even tenderly embrace each other. In this translation project I realised the authentic affinity between Punjabi and English.

Introduction

Punjabi is in my blood. Growing up in post-colonial Punjab I absorbed it with the arid summers and drenching monsoons. But its real value I discovered only when I left Punjab and came to the US as a high school student. It was far away that I began to long to hear the words coming from the lips of my family and friends. It was here in the US that I experienced English as a living language rather than a dead language written by poets long past like Shakespeare. So when I read Bhai Vir Singh's profoundly simple Punjabi verses, their English version came out almost instinctively.

Personally, during this translation project, memory and desire forcefully came together. Each and every poem from *Trel Tupke* and *Mere Sainyan Jio* had tremendous resonance for me. I'll share here my personal response to one of the poems. I don't know why I chose it. Perhaps I happened to work on it on my birthday? Perhaps I was identifying with the heavy absence hovering between its lines? In any case, it is from the anthology *Mere Sainyan Jio*, and it is titled 'Mashobra', the name of a hill station tucked away in the Himalayan range. Mashobra is a geographical space, which can be pointed out on the map of India. It is also a place in my imagination, for I learnt that my parents – who are no more – had spent many a delightful summer there soon after their marriage. My translation:

My brother Mashobra! Now tell me,
Weren't you that spectacular blossom –
Who was rejoicing like flowers?
Whose grass was luscious green?
Now that grass lies pale,
It looks so very pale,
It looks so very sad!
Your flowers are wilting –
They stand sadly with their heads down,
They shrivel and wither in pain!
Like a mother apart from her offspring,
They that bear fruit are fruitless
Laying bare the agony of separation!
Leaves too have changed their colours,
They fall off with the touch of breeze.

Introduction

The Fall season in Maine is full of apples. I have also begun to associate it with the lush dark purple Concord grapes that suddenly begin to appear on the vines encircling our fence outside. The New England Fall that I have now experienced for many decades is laden with the ripe fruit and swelling gourds and plump hazel shells that Keats had imprinted on my mental canvas even when I was growing up in India. Why then does Bhai Vir Singh's *Mashobra* with its impoverished imagery of decay and destitution overflow with such emotional plenitude for me?

The poet forges a filial relationship with the locale, for he addresses *Mashobra* as 'brother' (*vir mashobra*), and because of this human-nature bond established at the outset, his questions and musings through the text acquire a unique poignance. More personifications emerge: the grass is 'pale', it is 'sad'; flowers 'stand sadly with their heads down'... The landscape and humans are integrated as they go through the same motions and emotions: the paleness of the grass could be the loss of rosy hue of childhood and youthful sentiments; the drooping flowers or the fruitless fruit trees are no different from the mother psychologically shattered by the separation from her children. Furthermore, botanical and meteorological phenomena converge to augment the fragility of life: *leaves fall off with the touch of breeze!* We can hear a loud symphonic sigh as time past intersects dynamically with time present – intensifying the agony of loss, old age and death. The once robustly blooming scenes now transformed into a desolate nakedness are all a part of the cosmic process. In the poet's intuition, nature and humanity are inextricably woven together in the web of life. He does not think about nature in its functional role of creativity or destruction – it neither symbolises the 'womb' nor the 'tomb'; but rather, nature is his relative who shares the rarefied sensitivity and consciousness of the human mother parted from her children. With its cosmic sweep *Mashobra* opened up my losses too: Where is my home? My mother and father?

Where the original text strikes at that visceral self, the English equivalents flow out in their own momentum. Translation ultimately is a creative process. But the creativity lies in bringing out the transparency of the original and not blocking it by 'transcreations'. Though as scholars we have the tendency to explain and analyse, the role of the translator is not that of the interpreter. Keeping this distinction in mind, I did my

Introduction

best to relay exactly what and how the poet was saying. Occasionally, however, I did run into problems. How does one translate culturally specific idioms? For instance '*ghar khan nun avai*' – literally, the 'home gnaws at me' is a common Punjabi expression for loneliness. Since the literal did not make much sense in English, I was forced to translate it as 'a stranger I enter my own home'. Similarly keeping up with the Punjabi culture, the poet constantly repeats his verbs like '*vekh vekh*' (seeing seeing) or '*bhar bhar*' (brimming brimming), which did not translate well into English so I just left the repetition out. I also had difficulty finding synonyms for some typical Punjabi words like '*chiddi*' – little curdled bits that we kids found floating in our glasses of buttermilk!

Bhai Vir Singh's colloquialisms create some tricky situations. For instance in spoken Punjabi, '*na*' (not) is paradoxically used after a verb to exaggerate the act. For example, '*karo na*', literally 'do it not' really means 'do it won't you'. Therefore the plea in the last line of *Essian Ratan* – '*dio na essian ratan*' produces some ambiguity, for it could be read either as 'Give us such nights, won't you!' or 'Don't give us such nights!' Bhai Vir Singh also uses words like '*ni*' – a colloquial address for a female person, added after or before the noun (for example *bhaine 'ni* – sister dear? / O sister?), or '*jio*' – a suffix for respect (for example in the title of his work *Mere Sainyan Jio*). But there are no equivalents in the English language for either '*ni*' or '*jio*' that are ubiquitous in his text. For the most part, however, the fluidity of sound and sense and the emotional thrill or anguish, flowed across Punjabi into English.

Overall, I feel I gained a lot from this project. In the words of Kenneth Rexroth, it was 'poetic exercise on the highest level':

Translation, however, can provide us with poetic exercise on the highest level. It is the best way to keep your tools sharp until the great job, the great moment, comes along. more important, it is an exercise of sympathy on the highest level. The writer who can project himself into the exultation of another learns more than the craft of words. He learns the stuff of poetry. It is not just his prosody he keeps alert, it is his heart. The imagination must evoke, not just a vanished detail of experience, but the fullness of another human being.⁵

Introduction

The task of translation foremost teaches us to become intimate readers, for we can only translate after we have read the primary text slowly, very slowly and carefully. This intimacy of reading put me in touch with Bhai Vir Singh's poetic genius when at its zenith. In these poems he is not didactic as he is in many of his other writings. In his prelude to *Trel Tupke* he discloses:

These thoughts are not on any specific topic, these were not written for any specific purpose; but they show up like the dew that shimmers on grass and leaves ...⁶

Clearly, he is not developing or debating any theses or arguments here; the infinite surplus within seems to burst forth – delicate and shifting like the dewdrops. Consequently, when we read through his poems, we can almost see the author in tremors. I felt very fortunate to have connected with Bhai Vir Singh in his high and most creative moments. As a matter of fact, he 'infected' me with his own excitement, and I was on a high too! This process has been a sound training for my own heart, mind and imagination. Indeed, a perfect sabbatical exercise!

From his voluminous repertoire, I decided to pursue his early and late poems – *Trel Tupke* and *Mere Sainyan Jio*. They constitute comprehensive source materials in themselves, and with their wide temporal range, 'allow us to study the development of Bhai Vir Singh's style and thought. I also feel that in order to probe into the layers of his poetic construction, it is necessary that we have the collections in their entirety. Overall, the first anthology is stylistically more defined as it is patterned on the Persian quatrain called the Rubayat, which was popularized in the Punjab by the Sufi poets. Bhai Vir Singh graphically describes his style in his introduction to *Trel Tupke*: 'In the first two lines a thought rises and develops, in the third it returns like a wave, and in the fourth it reaches its conclusion'.⁷ By emulating the undulating rhythms of the sea to jot down the movement of his thoughts, the poet consciously seeks to be in tune with the cosmic symphony. The metaphor of intoxication is more conspicuous in this collection, which again is a central Sufi expression for the rapturous experience of the divine. We also find relatively more references to Muslim figures like Ranjha, Heer and the princess Roshanara in the first collection. Heer-Ranjha and Sassi-Punnu are the

Introduction

quintessential romantic lovers (equivalents of Romeo and Juliet), and Sufi poets like Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah had popularised them to spread the message of religious tolerance and communal harmony in the Punjab. So Bhai Vir Singh utilises them as the motif of immortal love. Interestingly, he even mentions Adam in *Trel Tupke*, and it is hard to say whether his interest in the primordial Western man comes down from the Sufi side or via British Christians. But in *Mere Sainyan Jio*, with the exception of a heroine like Sassi (in *Ojal Dachi*), we don't get proper names. We mostly come across anonymous 'women stone-cutters' or a 'yogi' or a 'lady'. In his final anthology music becomes strikingly more conspicuous. And it does not constrict itself to the Rubayat pattern. In fact, the poems in *Mere Sainyan Jio* vary greatly in their rhyming scheme and length. It seems that in his final publication Bhai Vir Singh lets go of all conventional patterns and lets his unconscious take over completely. Together *Trel Tupke* and *Mere Sainyan Jio* provide us with valuable insights into the poet's vast psychological and mystical world.

Themes important to him early on in life replay in amazing beauty in his final poetic discourse. *Trel Tupke* (Dew Drops) reveals a wonderful love for nature, and a confidence and exuberance in tone, which are naturally intensified in *Mere Sainyan Jio* (My Beloved). Written early in his career, the collection of 48 short poems in *Trel Tupke* has great relevance for our contemporary ecologically insensitive society. It does not express a romantic reverie, but a vital and complex intimacy between the poet and nature – eliciting a moral response from all of us across the globe. Nature is given a voice, a serious voice in which human oppression and exploitation are forcefully criticised. The helpless tree speaks. The delicate rose speaks. The caged bird speaks. In different tongues, these natural phenomena plead that we value and respect the earth and her powers. The poem entitled '*Brichh*' (Tree) could very well be questioning modern consumerism armed to destroy fields and jungles to set up its lucrative industries:

Oh selfish owners of land,
Why do you fight us?
We don't grow out
We grow tall and straight.
Our rings and breadth
Extend only in space;

Introduction

We take but a palm of land,
Even then you grudge us? (33)

Nature and culture are not split, and interestingly, nature also has commercial objectives! But rather than selfish manipulation and financial gain of a few, it seeks the material benefit of all in its own 'natural' way. Says the Rose:

Please do not cut us off our branch
For we've set up our business of fragrance.
Were million shoppers to come by,
Surely not one would go empty-handed.
But if you pluck us,
We'll be consigned only to you;
That too a meeting evanescent:
Out beauty and scent will soon vanish.

The Rose's rationale articulated in such a haunting tone should reach the ears of Western companies who are single-mindedly advancing into the Himalayan hills in search of delicate rose petals so that they can bottle them up in expensive perfumes.

The voice of nature remains ever important to the poet, and in *Mere Sainyan Jio* it acquires new nuances. One of the poems opens up like a riddle:

I am born of milk, but I am not yogurt.
I am born of milk, but I am not cream.
I am born of milk, but I am not butter.
I am born of milk, but I am not buttermilk.

When the speaker (*Chiddi*, the curdled bit) identifies herself, she is rejected for being good for nothing. But she explains at length that she possesses the gift to soften skin, and so even things we think are useless have their intrinsic worth. In a multiplicity of ways nature instructs humans to appreciate and respect her in her countless manifestations. In these last poems we also hear the language of the sea – 'Whish! Whish! bellowed the waves'; we hear the language of the stones: '*thatt tharar tharar thatt tharar tharar...*' On the whole, the elemental language of

Introduction

nature resonates melodiously with human alliterations and artistic repetitions to produce a cosmic symphony of wondrous beauty.

Bhai Vir Singh was always perceptive to the finitude of life and the infinity of existence. With his unique consciousness he enfolds his readers into the layers of history. One of my favourite pieces from *Trel Tupke* is Roshanara speaking from her grave in the Mughal gardens in Delhi:

Around my grave
Nature has planted a lovely garden;
Many visitors stroll in
But walk away from my grave.
O' you people don't you see,
It is not a corpse; it's me!
Flowers, fruits, leaves, sweet-peas,
Here they are – all me!

The flora and fauna around her grave is the princess herself! Like T.S.Eliot in the *Four Quartets*, Bhai Vir Singh makes us conscious of the cosmic cycle in space and time that we perpetually move through. In this short lyrical poem, he succeeds in transforming the mood from lamentation to celebration, the locale from grave to birth, the time from past to present, but the reality is simultaneously human and natural. We discover a breadth of vision and emotions as the Sikh male poet reaches out to identify himself with the sentiments of the historical Muslim princess. Through his mature and sophisticated aesthetic, the reader feels the immediacy and poignancy of the vibrant circular pulse of life.

The dynamic momentum of existence flows into his final collection as well. In *Mere Sainyan Jio* the poet (now eighty years old) reminds us of the universal dance that we all vigorously participate in:

Swept by the crisp breeze
Night and day flow
Playing their symphony
They sing their Lover's song
With their unstuck melody
They choreograph their Lover's dance –

Introduction

Reaching up to the trees
Embracing again and again.
Never does it stop
Never does it slow,
Constant is its flow;
Evening and morning are on the go.

The innocence and pristine joy of childhood is another theme present in both collections. In *Trel Tupke* we see a child-like poet bouncing colourful pebbles he finds by the seashore. In this poem entitled *Jauhari* (quite reminiscent of Tagore's *Gitanjali* where the children are absorbed in gathering and scattering pebbles!) the child enjoys the sheer bouncing of the pebbles – without any care for their monetary value. In a similar scene in *Mere Sainyan Jio* the elderly poet opens up the garden of childhood where we discover a little girl playing dress-up with her dolls, playing pebbles with her friends ...When she is sleeping her baby's sleep, the little girl has a visionary dream (in the poem, *Lagg Gai Si Bali Umare*). In an exquisite analogy from *Kokan Ber*, the almighty lover is compared with a child snatching candy from the mother's hand! The excitement of childhood evokes a cosmic nostalgia; it takes us to an uncluttered life where we were once free from social tensions and psychological angst, and experienced the pure bliss of innocence.

And of course the mystical vibrations of *Trel Tupke* seethe in *Mere Sainyan Jio*. The early and the later collections of poems share not only powerful motifs and themes, but also a fundamental spiritual longing. The heightened experience of the 'mystic' Bhai Vir Singh as he is popularly known, does not come later in life; it is present in his earliest poems:

Wherever I see, there is my beloved:
Here in a blade of grass, there – in that big forest! (*Trel Tupke*, 41)

Bhai Vir Singh palpably feels the divine within the fleeting visual and aural patterns. In fact the early Vir Singh gives a lot of importance to eyes and the phenomenon of vision. In his opening poem from *Trel Tupke*, he reminds us that we received the gift of eyes to see. In a plurality of ways he incites his readers to refine their senses so that they can have a metaphysical insight into the singular reality of the cosmos.

But we must not get caught up with the metaphysical in a way that we neglect all that is physically close. To the contrary, the poet wants us to savour the nitty-gritty things of daily life, including the curdled bits, the dew-drops, the wild berries. His short poems tune our senses to perceive the infinite beauty in *material* phenomena. Only by opening our eyes to the finite do we sense the infinite – ‘flitting on forms, they famish for more’ (*Trel Tupke*, 2). Preoccupied with our past and future, preoccupied with the big goals in life, preoccupied with a God out there, we miss out on the precious here and now and the spiritual energy in and all around us. This present volume holding together Bhai Vir Singh’s first and final pulsations offers us a glimpse into his spectacular mental kaleidoscope. In turn, we are honed to see and hear and smell and touch and taste the singular magic flowing through our universe.

That sense of the One is a real gift to us living in the dangerously divided and polarised twenty-first century. If we could feel the vibrations of the cosmic symphony, we would restructure our course of action; instead of divisions and conflict, we would work for mutual harmony and goodwill. When we hear the voice of the rose or the stone or the sea or the sun, we realise that we are but one species in an intricate and mysterious web. The realm of aesthetics is not divorced from the ethical; art is not merely for art’s sake – it has a social, cultural, political and psychological function. If we would genuinely **respond** to *Cosmic Symphony: The Early and Later Poems of Bhai Vir Singh* then we must become **responsible** for the welfare of our diverse and complex universe.

¹ Harbans Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972), p. 25.

² Gurbachan Singh Talib and Harbans Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh: Poet of the Sikhs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976) (A Unesco collection), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

³ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in Hannah Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations, Walter Benjamin: Essays and Reflections* (NY: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 72.

⁴ Cited by Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵ Kenneth Rexroth, “The Poet as Translator” in Bradford Morow (ed.) *World Outside the Window: Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1987), p. 190.

⁶ *Bhai Vir Singh Rachnavali*, Vol I (Collection of Poetry) (Patiala: Department of Languages, 1972), p. 23.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

DEW DROPS

Trel Tupke

Vision

Didar

O Reality of this scene,
Do not cast us aside!
Deep inside you somewhere,
Lie our music and melodies;
If you keep us tucked in your interstices,
You'll bloom and rejoice;
You gave us the gift of eyes –
May we never lose you from sight!

Eyes

Ankhian

Eyes formed from
 The pain to see the formless
Forged in front of our faces
 Fashioned in form exterior –
They see exquisite scenes
 And savour delicious joy. But
The hunger for the formless doesn't go:
Flitting on forms, they famish for more.

Smitten

Lagian

Something is happening in me O friends
That flying out of hand –
Spinning weaving laughing playing
Eating – has lost all meaning.
Eyes well up with tears drawn from my heart,
I am utterly lost;
Our spinning world is strangely awhirl,
A stranger I enter my own home.

Sundered Eyes

Vichurian Ankhian

Like the lashing monsoon rain,
 Scorching and surging they pour
With longing they reveal the road,
 They vanish, they reappear;
As the evening slowly sinks
 My ache to see you grows,
In pain my hungry eyes
Lower and lower go.

Dew and Sun

Trel Te Suraj

On grass I stay, says the dew,
All eyes I am;
Longing for you I welled up
And water, sheer water, I became –
Now a drop of desire
With nothing of me!
O come from your celestial seat –
I'm spread at your feet to hold you tight.

My Beloved

Mainda Piara

I am wounded, I am pierced, O friends
 By the tips of that plume!
I am strung along like thousands of others,
 On your string of pearls.
The deeper it pierces, the more my heart aches,
 Pain shoots in drenching ecstasy,
A new life arises as I see
That diamond sparkling its rays.

Preparations

Tyarian

Ranjha sits in his village of Takht Hazare,
 Frolicking with his sisters-in-law, –
The cup is still raised in
 The hand of the potter who shapes
A slender Heer with her head bent
 Standing by the river's bend;
The mighty Chenab moves on
Each little drop stands still.

Vice

Badi

Shining mirrors – grapes and raisins,
 Nature brings forth herself!
They pour out sweet succulence,
 They garland lush vines.
You plucked them off into your jar,
 Waiting for them to ferment,
Their wine is bittersweet
But you drink it to the bottom!

Still Ranjha

Achal Ranjha

Our Ranjha lives in Takht Hazare,
He never leaves his village;
He pierces Heer with longing
Who is far away in Jhang Sial;
He will neither visit nor invite,
He draws her with his melodious flute;
He stays still by the waters,
Will he be disappointed? Will he be blessed?

Immortal Drink

Amar Rasa

Soft hands, carafe and cup
 Turn sadness into smiles.
Seeing the happy face,
 The carafe begins to cry.
Seeing her tears, our good person says,
 ,This is no bitter wine:
Immortal wine fills your carafe,
Bringing the dead to life,

Give us a drop from your carafe –
 Let thoughts drown in the sea
Lift us up to the inebriated skies
 Shatter all agendas and anxieties.
Radiant nine colours we see
 As our swings go round in ecstasy!
Wafts of infinite comforts come to embrace –
Never to return – such is their union!

Alchemist or Honeybee?

Pasari Ki Makhir?

A chemist plucked a rose,

 He blended it with sugar over and over;

For sweetness he tried in vain,

 But the bitterness remained.

Had he gathered a drop like the honeybee:

 Neither the rose would be lost nor its flavour;

The bond with the gardener would not be severed,

The soothing drink would be enjoyed forever.

To The One Who Plucks The Rose
Gulab Da Phul Toran Wate Nun

Please do not cut us off our branch
 For we've set up our business of fragrance.
Were million shoppers to come by,
 Surely not one would go empty-handed.
But if you pluck us
 We'll be consigned only to you;
That too a meeting evanescent:
Our beauty and scent will soon vanish.

Cognition-Inebriation

Hosh-Masti

Why did it happen? How did it happen?

Questioning so, generations go.

Why do you take the path O life

Where sailors have lost their lives?

Quit wandering; anchor in that one;

So revel and live in comfort.

Better than cognition is inebriation

That keeps us harboured at our port.

Devotion

Maganta

While living in the Garden of Eden,
 Adam, they say had some fruit.
He was charged a criminal and
 Expelled from the land of paradise.
Had he pressed the fruit in a jar
 And drunk its nectar,
Adam would have gone far beyond Eden:
He would have attained the eternal seat!

Obstinacy-Ecstasy

Hath-Rasa

Don't lose your cool, O obstinate one

Don't get angry at nature!

Subtler than our hair

Hidden currents flow in her.

Get out of obstinacy, dye in ecstasy;

Be the enjoyer, the winner of joys.

It all comes in a flash of lightning

Make sure you don't lose it!

Possessed

Be Khudi

One day my preceptor gave me a drink
 Made from the herb of inebriation –
Soon I was whirled on a swing
 Stroked from the skies far away
Round and round and higher I soared
 Not once did the grip undo!
O our alluring Lover,
Swirl us ever higher to you!

Higher Wisdom

Ucchi Mati

With my heart clutched tight, I spiral down,
Depression has hit me low;
That laughter, those smiling faces
The more I want to catch, the farther they go.
How do I jump on the swing of oblivion
To catch some peace and calm?
These brakes pulling me down
Won't let go!

Clutches of your heart will release
If you hang on to the Highest One;
Its pull will spring you up.
With your strong hands
Steal away its beauty and
Hold it in your heart.
So you'll be freed from your depression:
Those choking chains will surely break open.

Encaged Bird

Pinjare Pia Panchi

Merciless, he stands in the open air
 Claims, 'What a pretty cage!'
But if he were inside, I'd ask
 'Now tell me how beautiful is it?'
Without wings I am a captive on land.
 You heartless idiot:
For a flying bird
You call this deathly prison lovely?

The merciless liked its colour,
 He liked its sweet tones too.
How nice of him to profess its merits
 Having cast his net so slyly before!
He captured the bird, put it in the cage
 And parted it from all its friends.
To hell with your praises,
Your friendship is zilch!

Today

Ajjo

Sip it today, sip it now
Keep on sipping
From the cup of primal nectar
Don't take your lips away.
Sip it always and get high
Its ecstasy will not wane;
Who knows about tomorrow?
Soon we may be bones and ash.

Struck Forever

Laggian Nibhan

I fell in love with stone
 Who neither smiles nor speaks;
Its beauty enchants me
 But its heart is locked.
I can't break away
 I find no warmth to stay.
Right! Whatever you will, will be
But keep us always in your sight.

In Fear

Bhae Vic

Seeing the cloud approach, the mountain
Trembled, — he screamed out loud:
With your handsome exterior, O plunderer,
Have you come on your rounds again?
Where will I find a canvas so large,
Under which I could hide away?
Our covering — O world refuge!
Keep us compassionately screened.

Sweetly the cloud spoke
Revealing its shiny self —
My account is clear, I kept nothing;
I deliver what I am given.
Out there is our Giver, you are our steward,
I am a mere distributor.
You and I work in fear —
Both of us cohorts in the Owner's game.

Facing The Water Flow

Raun Rukh

The ocean asks the stream:

 You carry umpteen bushes and brambles,

How come you don't deliver

 Any bamboo shoots to me?

The stream replies,

 I can easily uproot all haughty plants,

But I have no control over

That one – facing the water flow!

Memory

Yad

Etched deep inside

The memory of my Lover is constant

It resonates divine melodies

Like the sound of waves

It inebriates like wine

It vibrates like string

Pulling and shooting rhythmic spasms

Even so it brings much solace to me.

Knowledge, Addiction

Ilm, Amal

Carrying a begging bowl on my head
I wandered in search of knowledge
From door to door I begged for food
Filling my bowl to the brim.
My stuffed bowl made me feel stuffy –
A learned scholar me.
With my head held high
I walked touching the skies.

One day I took this bowl and
Place, it before a sage. Saying,
'False! False!' he flipped it over,
And emptied all its contents.
He scrubbed off its mental stains
And wiped the begging bowl clean
See, how this bowl now shines:
Like a lotus blooming brilliantly.

Addict-Abstainer

Aqli-Sophi

Give us a drop from your carafe
 Just give us one, O love!
Give us its half or yet even half of half,
 O give us the tiniest of the tiny, Beloved.
Just once may we have a sip
 So we break our vow of abstinence!
We stand at your threshold
Give us a taste O Beloved!

Music

Sangeet

Inspiring emotions, lofty ideas
Dyed in subtle colours,
Congeal into ice as soon as
They meet this frigid world.
Your warm melody
Kindles them again
That is why musicians call it –
A stairway to heaven.

Parting-Meeting

Vichora-Vasal

I rinsed the coal with soap,
 I soaked it in milk and yogurt,
I even steamed it in dye,
 But it did not change its colour.
Its dark is from parting,
 It won't go till we meet;
Feel it on the pores of your skin –
See how it colours!

Tree

Brichh

Oh selfish owners of land,
 Why do you fight us?
We don't grow out,
 We grow tall and straight.
Our rings and breadth
 Extend only in space;
We take but a palm of land
Even then you grudge us?

Beyond-Time

La-Maka

My heart won't listen to me,
 It has reached a place –
A timeless abode
 In its wondrous minarets
Without past or future
 It loses its self;

It returns dripping in love, but
Does not know or say anything.

Lofty Vistas

Ucchi Nazar

Get up my friend,

 You are given wings to fly!

Why be on knees

 When you can reach the skies?

With lofty sight and towering might

 Keep your aims ever high.

Endowed with celestial powers,

Why should you grovel so low?

Double Gaze

Duvalli Jhak

By the river sat an ascetic
 Gazing at the dividing line –
First at the land then water
 Again at the land then water, he gazed.
How could he stay pure?
 Everything is grimy or wet!
Ultimately without food and water,
He wasted away!

Didn't Cross The Limits

Haddon Par Na Hoe

She flew into the distant skies
 And perched herself on the clouds.
Ah, there too the same sphere –
 A woven blue cap over each head!
She soared further,
 Flying far beyond the planets –
Her head continued to whirl
Azure blue making her dizzy.

Somehow Not Caught

Kiven Na Fadinda

With those seductive eyes

 Strapping your suspenders you appear –

Spinning my head,

 Shooting sensations I cannot bear!

Sometimes you come and stay on my lips –

 Smiling, sipping, savouring;

With you I begin to quiver with joy,

A jolt, my heart is snatched away!

Ecstatic I jump to catch,

 But you run away;

Slipping from my hands,

 You elude us all.

Gentle love, our great honour,

 How do I catch you?

For a moment it's almost as though –

Alas! How quickly from my arms you go!

Rhythm of the Melody

Rag Di Sur

A tender tune arose,
 And stood by me;
It shot a spasm,
 Of ferocious velocity.
I vibrated into ecstasy –
 Dreaming in transcendent colours;
Joyous waves from the heavens above,
Immerse me in a timeless zone!

Wherever I See There Is My Beloved

Jitt Wal Nazar Utte Wal Sajjan

Imprinted on my vision

My beloved glides down

Further and further

Deep into my self.

When my eyes close,

I see my beloved inside;

And when they open,

My beloved is right in front;

Wherever I see there is my beloved:

Here in a blade of grass, there – in that big forest.

Looking Towards The Skies

Arshan Wal Nazar

If the potter had put eyes
 On top of my head
I promise I'd always be
 Looking towards the skies.
Placed below my forehead
 Down is their trend;
What lies below my face,
That's all I manage to see.

It's true, from primordial times,
 Your eyes are not on your head;
But the tendons of your neck
 Are made exquisitely supple –
You are free to see
 Up, down, all around;
Now only if you'd look up,
All glory would be yours!

Name, Devotion, Will

Nam, Dhyan, Raza

Your Name was lodged forever on my tongue, –
 Though you walked away;
Your devotion occupied my eyes, –
 Instructed by your will.
Extend your lovesickness to us too,
 Oh Beloved, if you will!
I cannot forget you ever,
My every bit stings with longing!

Illumination

Sinyan

While making rock-candy,
The sugar in the wok
Turned into charcoal – and she
Lamented what she saw.
Oh naïve one! You need that fire
To melt sugar into rock-candy.
Without that illuminating fire,
There is no comfort!

I Am Sad To See The World Suffer

Dard Dekh Dukh Anda

Seeing the world suffer,
 My heart sinks lower and lower;
My inside melts like wax,
 Tears wet my cheeks.
Even if we may sacrifice ourselves,
 The world still suffers;
Yet we cannot turn into stone:
Seeing the world suffer, I am sad.

Blessings And Actions

Bakhshish Te Karam

Exclaiming, 'You sinner' 'you sinner'
The priest reduced me to sheer guilt.
We are walled in, my friend,
But our Giver is beyond boundaries.
People living with borders
Can never act free;
By the blessing of the Infinite
Our walls break, we act freely.

Slave or Master?

Barda Ki Malik?

A fellow roamed into a fair
 With a placard around his neck
On it was written: 'I am a slave
 On sale, buy me please.'
I heard a whisper in my ear,
 He is not looking for a master:
He is looking for a slave,
Whom he can rule over!

Exulting Self

Ape Da Uchal

When we jump out of our egotistic self,
That is when we savour true joy;
If we divide our self from the Other,
How can we ever exult?
Recognise that your joy
Comes from the Other
So know, hold and leap high –
Your true self will never shatter.

Roshan Ara (From Her Grave)

Roshan Ara (Samadh Chon)

As you enter, Ah how your footprints
 Adorn my garden!
I do not plead, I make no request,
 I don't even urge you tarry.
My barren garden bears nothing,
 Except for a delicate imprint –
Perhaps a flicker of your memory
May engrave me in your heart again?

Roshanara To The Visitors

Roshanara Yatrian Nun

Around my grave,
Nature has planted a lovely garden;
Many visitors stroll in,
But walk away from my grave.
O' you people don't you see:
It is not a corpse; it is me!
Flowers, fruits, leaves sweetpeas and
Here they are – all me!

A Deathless Tomb In Delhi

Dilli Di Ikk Benisha Samadhi

While I was alive, the handsome one did not visit,
He did not come at the end;
He did not make any great journey,
He did not even send a gift.
This tomb of mine now embellishes the earth
But I still remain bereft of his glance!
Oh while I long for you lying here,
You do what your heart desires!

The Self Inide

Ape Wich Apa

Oh mother mine

I just woke up from a dream –

There was only 'me' nobody else, and

Yet, there was someone somewhere hiding

Who touched me and made me tremble

With deliciousness that still devours me!

Tell me who it was. How did it enter?

How does it hide? How do I seek?

Jeweller

Jauhari

Playing by the seashore
I found some stones
Their colours unique and brilliant
Sparkled a new aesthetic.
But I bounced them in the air like pebbles
Like a child I was playing with them.
Soon a jeweller walked over
He took my stones away.

He inspected and he dissected,
and nodding his head he said:
'What are they called?
Neither are they any of the nine gems,
Nor are they any sort of marble;
So how do I measure their worth?'
I answered, 'Oh leave them alone,
Let me play with them;
When you learn to count beyond numbers
Only then you'll be able to appraise.'

Bondage-Liberty

Band-Khalasi

We came across an amazing hunter
 Who puts his catch in a cage.
But he does not lock it
 He does not shut its window.
And if we shut the cage
 He opens it wide again.
Fusing bondage with freedom,
He creates fabulous colours.

MY BELOVED

Mere Sainyan Jio

Introduction

Prarambh

My songs!
My songs, my Beloved!
Songs sung for you, where did they go?
You walked away silently, alas, why?
My heart-*veena* stopped still, why?
Its tender tremors, its lovely vibrations,
Why do they lie arrested in silence?
Now, my Beloved! What can I offer you?
Who could I send to your musical concerts
To perform my childlike wonders for you?

*** , *** ***

My songs –
Songs of praise for my Beloved!
Yes, come back, come back my love!
Tighten the strings of my heart-*veena*
Perform your wonders on its taught strings,
Let the heart wrenching tunes
And delightful songs flow;
Pierce my mind again with your touch!
May waves rise like breeze from the ocean,
My silent voice surges like the nightingale singing.
Yes, may the faltering sounds from a child's throat,
Reach forth –
To your presence,
My Beloved!

A Hearty Welcome!

Jio Aiyan Nun

You have been behind clouds,
 For so many days handsome sun!
I have been waiting in pain,
 To see your radiance again!
You have appeared on your own this morning,
 Welcome, a most hearty welcome!
Seeing you brings me tremendous joy,
Your lustre fills our earth and skies.

Stay Smoothly Spread

Vicchia Rahu

Stay spread like the mat at the door,
Stay flat, my mind! Stay smoothly spread.
It has no ruffles, not a bit of anger,
So stay by renouncing your ego;
Like the earth spread flat yet full of hope,
Waiting for the auspicious rain;
The giver of the auspicious rain,
Is but your own benevolent Beloved!

Struck By Desire

Lagg Gai Si Bali Umare

I was a little girl then
Playing dress-up with my dolls,
Playing games with my friends
And singing songs with my brothers.
I was a little girl of tender age.

*** *** ***

I was sound asleep locked in childhood sleep,
 Nobody was around me – no nurse, mother, father.
The moon in the skies was sending its silvery rays
 Stars were emitting their caressing waves –
 Soft delicious waves hit my tender face.
You came cloaked in the night of silver
 You kissed my forehead in moonlight's dazzle,
You slipped a ring around my little finger,
 Then you bowed down and whispered something in my ear.
I was sound asleep, but perhaps inside I was wide awake
 You went away cloaked in the night of silver.

*** *** ***

I woke up. I woke up from my baby's sleep
 I looked around as though I was somebody other,
 Yes, I was a stranger to myself.
Thinking – was I lying lost somewhere?
 Or was I found and returning home?
 My young mind could not fathom.
My forehead throbbed in joy
 – A delicious fountain burst inside –
 'What happened to my forehead?' I could not say.
My little finger shook shooting tremors all the way
 I wore the ring I had received in my dream

Cosmic Symphony

Looking around I saw words glittering in circles,
 'Beloved! My Beloved!' written in its dazzling script.
A constant melody echoed in my ears,
 It was the song 'Beloved! My Beloved.'
A naïve little girl I was struck by desire –
 'Beloved Mine, Beloved, My beloved!'

*** *** ***

You came back in a dream again,
 Flashing your effulgence you swept away
– 'It was me, me' you said in a musical symphony
 But off you went not waiting a wink.
My desire grew even more when I woke up
 'Beloved, Beloved' I said, 'please come to me'
'Close, close, near me, here, closer to me
 Come my Beloved! Yes please do come for sure!
Kisses with your own lips see how they make it flutter
 My forehead, look at it, also look at my trembling finger –
 Yes, with the ring you slipped on, and that too trembles
It wants to touch your lotus feet
Seeking a vision of your luminous form.'

Priceless Gift

Vadmulli Dat

I heard someone say:
'Your Love has come today,
Has gone to the temple.'
I took off in a rush
I had barely reached the station
When I heard a musical echo –
The sound of necklace bells of chariot horses.
I stood glued on the path thinking –
I will have a glimpse, my divine vision
My Beloved will look out the chariot
With those lovely eyes – will look at me once.

*** *** ***

Along with my thoughts the chariot arrived
A wonderful vision was right in front:
'My Beloved!'
Yes, I had the vision,
'My Beloved!'

*** *** ***

But off they flew with the chariot
In a flash –
Those horses faster than the wind
Yes, their tracks were in the middle of the dirt road.
So by the lines on the road
On my feet
Yes, on my feet
I sat –
I picked up a bit of dust with my right hand
I raised it to my forehead, yes,

Cosmic Symphony

I put the speck of glorious dust on my forehead.
I told my mind: think about it
This too is a gift –
Eyes were brimming full
Dust stuck to my forehead
Voice broke into words:
This is a gift beyond price.
Yes, it was a miracle
Receiving the gift of dust
Along with the visionary flash
This priceless gift!
This priceless gift!

The Bamboo Basket

Vans Di Tori

When I sing your songs, my Beloved,
I dwell in your presence;
It is in your absence
That I realise, you
Yes, you were the singer of my songs:
I was but a lifeless bamboo basket,
Empty, full of holes
You yourself fill me with songs!
– A mere bamboo basket
In a flash you come and exalt me.

Joy, Enjoyer, Enjoyment

Ras, Rasia, Rasal

The *veena* says to its player:
'I add colour to your songs.'

The player wrapped it in its covers
And put it away.
That's when the *veena* realised:
I was all wood, strands and strings
My body had no life
This is my Beloved's immutable magic
That filled me with music.
Every fibre turned into a chord,
That recited love love ever louder;
My Beloved sang along,
Enchanted by my song.
Yes, my Beloved sang, played the music as well
– Ecstatically swaying from side to side
The enjoyer was fully enjoying.

*** *** ***

Wondrous, wondrous are your feats, my Beloved!
Felicitations to you on the beauty of your songs
You are the song, the music and the essential taste
You are the joy, the enjoyer and all enjoyment.

Meeting Time

Mil Vela Uu

Calling out loud by the river,
Frantically waving my arms in the air,
Stammering 'Beloved, Beloved,' but
 You carefree self you!

Swim? I can't, my arms are too weak,
The river hisses in its tidal waves.
Walk? I can't, there is no path,
 Lover, friend, you comforter!

My raft is too old,
Too ragged from use,
I see no oars, no ferryman,
 Going across is far too threatening.

Amidst billowing clouds and gusty winds,
Men who pilot aeroplanes,
Scream and yell in panic:
 - 'This is not the time to fly.'

My helplessness knows no bounds my love!
The wish to meet you has doubled itself
I am calling you in agony My Beloved
 Come, you come yourself and meet with me!

You are omnipotent with all the facilities
You can do whatever you want my dear
You also have compassion and empathy
Quickly then let the meeting time be.
You may be carefree!
But

You are lover, friend, my comforter!
Come, you come yourself and meet with me
 Quickly let the meeting time be.

I Myself Go To Their Door

Janda Ap Han Uhna De Duar

Tired from grazing my goats
In the heat of the sun
As I sat on a stone in the shade of the chinar tree,
Your soldier, my love, came over to me,
And read me your commandment:-
 'At night, yes, at midnight,
Come to the mansion and knock at the door
In the royal palace -
From the back gate.'
The king himself will open
His portal.
Yes, you poor destitute!
The king is captivated
By your beauty wearing rags.

*** *** ***

At times I thought it was a joke
Even so
Lonely and shaky
I started to go in the middle of the night.
 I walked and I stopped,
Sometimes strolling, sometimes wobbling,
I have reached your place,
Honourable king! Open your gate!

*** *** ***

The black clouds of my luck
Joined the darkness of the sky,
Darkness fell all around,
Stumbling over and over

Holding tightly on my knot of hope
I have reached your place,
Honourable king! Open your gate!

*** *** ***

Raindrops are beginning to fall,
Easterly wind is sweeping by,
My king!
Amidst the army of roaring clouds,
Lightning is thundering in the skies.
My eyes are blinded by its flash
The closed doors are revealed.

Open your locks for me.

*** *** ***

Where are those closed doors?
I died at your entrance –
Seeing your closed doors
Stabbed by the lashing rain.

*** *** ***

This here is my own shack –
Made of straw and cane
Seated inside is my great king –
King, the magnificent king of kings!
How did you come to my straw hut?
How did I reach your closed gates?

*** *** ***

Enfolding me in his arms
The king opened his lips –
'Those who love me,
They go to my door
Looking for me,
But whom I love,
I myself go to their door,–
Their door is my door too.'

Presence

Hazuri

○ my friends, my love did not come,
But he sent a gift of his presence –
He made us come to him
Persuasively, forcefully;
In his presence we became present –
Close, very close and near, very near,
Our distance was removed!
Look at our Beloved's magic –
He moved our distance away!

Recognition of My Beloved

Sainyan Ji Di Sian

Who are they who say:
'Your Beloved cannot be recognised?'

My Beloved!
Those with eyes recognise
Your beauty overflowing
From scenes to sight!

Those with ears recognise
Your musical rhythms
Echoing in our cosmos.

Yes, the dancing, bouncing fragrances
Give you away!
To those who can smell, my Beloved!

Then those without fear
Recognise you
From your exciting touch.

*** *** ***

Your ambrosial drops
From some distant planet
Pour, into the mouths
Of those who call you –
Like *papiha*, the ever thirsty love-bird.
They give a taste of your being
To those with the heightened sense
Higher than the five senses.
Yes!

Cosmic Symphony

You reveal yourself to them:
– With wreaths of flowers – you stand behind
To garland their minds –
A step forward, a step backward,
Meeting, separating, embracing tightly,
You merge with them
Like the river with the sea.

In The Tiny Lap

Nikki God Vich

At the touch of light today
When 'morning' was beginning to stir
Against the burgeoning white lap of dew
Within the silky lap of a blossomed rose
You were playing my Beloved!
How, yes! How
Did you enter that tiny lap?
My great and vast Beloved!

Yes, Will Meet For Sure

Milso, Han, Milso Zarur

'I met'

You met, yes, you met
Yes, you met for sure
Having met you intensified
The desire to meet you even more.

'Will meet'

Yes you, said, I will meet
Your words echo
Twice as loud.

'Used to meet'

Yes, you visited me in my dreams,
Upon waking the pain of parting is twice over
Yes, the pain of parting is twice over.

'Will you meet?'

Since you said 'will meet'
You will meet for sure!
But months weeks days
Hours seconds in millions
– like the flowing waters –
Have incessantly gone by.
A child is sitting by the river
He is counting the surging waves
Neither they finish nor does the counting.
The river has myriad partings
The waves go by never ending.
Will you meet when they stop my love
Or somewhere in the middle of their flow?

Mere Sainyan Jio

*** *** ***

Your word is true, true is your promise,
Your blessings are true, true what you say;
But I am a child, an impatient child
I cannot wait
No my Beloved do not delay!
You will meet, yes you will meet
This is my hope, this is my core –
From it my life spins forth
My Beloved!
My life's cord!

No Room For Words

Bolan Da Nahion Tan

My memory – that memory of mine,
Erases all chasms my Beloved!
But when you come and embrace
Take me tightly in your arms
I lose control over my words –
How can I explain my state?
Be quiet O friend, O handsome be quiet!
Words dissolve into ineffable silence
Understanding, thought and speech
Here come to an end
Yes, my friend!
When you take me tightly in your arms
There is no room for words
The art of language is lost.

Beloved's Land

Saiyan Da Desh

Here you come playing your lute O Jogi!
Singing songs of angst
You are roaming like a lunatic,
Are you coming from the Beloved's land?
If you are coming from there then give us his message,
Give us some news about our Love;
Tell me how far
Is my Beloved's land?

Jogi – There behind lies the Beloved's land
Listen young lady!
There behind lies the Beloved's land
My Beloved's land.
I ventured out to see the world –
I'd started on my travels
I have forgotten the way to the good land
Far away is the Beloved's land.
I am searching for some sign
Roaming from country to country,
Searching every city, village and street,
Searching through forests and trees
I can't find any path
To the land of my Beloved
To the land of your Beloved.

Lady – Try playing your lute again
I will sing along with it
So we'll join our songs of separation.
A saint close by whispered:
'His ears are music.'
Yes, the Beloved's ears are music
Come now let us sing songs
Songs of his praise;
Songs of our separation.

Well Done!

Shabash!

I have not yet mastered any tunes or notes,
Nor any rhythm or melody;
I don't have a singing voice,
Nor, my love, the art of harmony.
Yet I have the urge to sing
Which never subsides, so
What do I do?
I also wish you'd hear my song
Which only grows stronger by the day!
Why? My Beloved, you
Don't ever scold or frown at me?
Instead, you listen rapt
Swaying side to side with eyes shut
Sometimes a tenderly whispered
shabash
Reaches my ears!

Inner Eyes

Andarle Nain

Eye –

The human eye
Could not see you
My Beloved!
Darkness had overtaken
Knowledge and intelligence.
It still cannot see you,
The brilliance is too dazzling –
Yes, the strong light of intellect is blinding.

Do cast a favourable glance:
Do open those inner eyes
Which would recognise you –
Whether it be light, dark or bedazzling,
You, my Beloved! Beloved!
In every place, in every colour, in every direction
Playing everywhere, yet remaining apart!
Handsome, you are the height of splendour.

Pot

Taula

Today I have come at the door –
 Yes at your own door
In the guise of a beggar,
 O wealthy one!
Drop in a gift,
 Do drop it in,
As I beg at your door,
 O wealthy one.
The pot is beside me –
 Can it hold anything?
Yes, perhaps something!
 No, nothing at all!

Loneliness

Ikkal

Giver with a thousand ears
Please listen to me!
Without you 'loneliness' has made me paranoid
I come to your door, rescue me O wealthy One!
Amidst my own or strangers, in small or big crowds
Amidst forests or flowers, by the river or the sea
I am afflicted with loneliness. It does not leave me.
Nobody can heal me except you
Give me your vision – cure me
I sacrifice myself to my Beloved
Give me your gift
 I stand at your door
Give me your self –
I am yours after all.

Evening and Morning on the Go

Turdi Sanjh Saver

Swept by the crisp breeze
Night and day flow
Playing their symphony
They sing their Lover's song
With their unstuck melody
They choreograph their Lover's dance –
Reaching up to the trees
Embracing again and again!
Never does it stop
Never does it slow
Constant is its flow
Evening and morning are on the go

Spring

Bahar

'Spring is here'
'Spring is here'
Hearing the call,
Flowers came out to see
Blooming with joy.
Lifting their fragrance
Spring swung ahead
Lifting their fragrance
Spring swung ahead
And entering our house
Says: 'Open your doors.'
Then in an uproar:
'There is no more winter or snow,
so open your doors.'

*** *** ***

Says:
Listen to the buzz of the bumblebee
Listen to the hum of the honeybee
Listen to the chirping birds
Listen to the nightingale's songs
Listen to the classical melodies
Patterned on the spring Raga Basant
Listen to the joy beating in every heart.

*** *** ***

She carried good tidings –
Coming from the lover's home
She spoke:
Now hear carefully,

Cosmic Symphony

The Beloved will soon show up
So get ready as beautifully as you can
Get ready now –
Keep your eyes tightly focused
Keep your doors wide open
The Beloved will come
The Beloved will surely come.

A Fleeting Instant

Chinn

My friend dear! Listen to me:
Between my walking and falling asleep
There is an incredible instant,
Deep in it
Hides an ambrosial drop –
Like the honey
In the flower.
That instant I intimately touch –
Perhaps the threshold of my love.
It is a shock awakening
How can we catch it sister dear!
How can we seize that fleeting instant forever?

Waking Up From This Sleep

Jagi Jan Es Nindon

I was a little girl
Getting ready to go to school,
When I slipped into
Another state.
I fell sound asleep
But I was fully aware
I could feel a transcendent delight
Beginning to take over.
Naïve, I could not understand
I was totally taken in
By an infinite bliss
Filtering through me.

*** *** ***

When I woke from this sleep –
My auspicious sleep
Inducing an ecstasy
That broke all barriers
I wondered:
Where did it commence?
The deliciousness for which
I now seethe with desire?

My Message

Mera Sandesh

Oh black pigeon
 Welcome my dear brother!
Flying across buildings
 Splitting through trees
You have finally arrived.
 Have you brought any message for me?
This blue necklace of yours,
 Carries no note no letter.
I was sad to begin with,
 I am now all the more.
Yes, I understand brother!
 You didn't come to deliver,
 You came to carry my message.

*** *** ***

Since you are flying back brother
To my Beloved's place,
 Do carry my message!
I'll fasten my letter to your necklace:
 'My eyes are two fountains
 Bursting with tears
 Bursting with big hot tears.'

Sign

Sainat

About the joy in holding our Love
Tighter and tighter –
Ask the breeze
That caresses the ocean waves,
For she alone can explain.

Ask the fragrance:
What is the joy in embracing our Love?
Rippling through the garden
She will give you a sense
Of the scent from holding the Beloved tight.

Ask the beautiful woman:
What is the joy in embracing our Love?
Her lips breaking into smile
Her eyes bouncing with light
Will say it all
She'll teach you the joy of embracing.

The joy of meeting with our Love,
Ask the one who is imbued in colour:
Tears fill his eyes,
His forehead glows
With the sign that shows
This is the joy of divine union.

Disclosure of Love

Preet Di Ugarh

My Beloved!

I sing your songs,

So I am a trained singer;

I recite your praise,

So I am an eminent poet;

I call in endearing tones,

So I am courteous in manner;

I express pangs of parting,

So I am a renowned lover;

When somebody gives me a bit,

I begin to think that I am their beloved.

Today, yes today

I realise I am a bundle of wishes –

Standing at your threshold

With my begging bowl

A beggar posing as a giver!

This is my love's disclosure

Help me Love! My Beloved.

My Crisis

Meri Mushkal

Parted from you, I cry and say,
 'Do please come!'

But when I think about the hassle
 I'd be putting you through,
I say, 'Don't!'

Then I think I should go,
 But how do I make it?

My Beloved,
 Please get me out of my crisis!

You Planted This Sapling

Tuhon Buti Eh Lai Si

This sapling of your memory
Was planted by your sight
With your one glance,
It was animated with life.
A breath from you,
Suffused it with fragrance.
A scent reaches my mind again
My consciousness is inebriated.
If you forget us
How could we stay in bloom?
Our vibrant and fragrant love
It was you who poured out your gift!
Don't forget us even for an instant
May we not forget either
That this fragrant sapling
Was planted by you!
Pass the *veena* in my hands
And fill me with music
So I burst into my song – 'You Beloved!
You planted this sapling.'

Swoop of the Swan

Hans Pheri

Seeing the swan flying in the skies:

Come you swimmer
With so elegant a gait
Dive down from the vast skies,
Come to me, you who fly so high!

I know not how to fly
I trip as I walk by,
I cannot swim
O saviour mine!

I have no talents
I learnt nothing
I have no virtue
O treasure of virtues!

Do cast a glance
Oh light of lights!
I sit waiting for you
O compassionate One!

Let me be able to say,
"I had your vision
In the beauty of a swan"
You wondrous beauty

You with eyes!
With penetrating eyes
Send me a glance
From your effulgence above!

Do swoop low
Give us your shade
Come down from your lofty flights
You auspicious One!

To the swan descending into the pool:—
You have come down on your own,
Now come close to me for a moment,
You who glide so regally
Across the ocean of my mind!

From the heart of the sea
My eyes discovered two pearls,
They are set on my palms
For your benevolent glance!

These pearls are not pierced
Come close – pick them up,
You shining white splendour,
Collect my two pearls!

Where Are You?

Kitthe Ho?

Where are you?
I know close by!
Why don't you call me?
 You do, but my ears don't hear you.

Where are you?
I know close by!
Why can't you be seen?
 You can be, but my eyes don't picture you.

Where are you?
I know close by!
Why can't we meet?
 We can, but my arms don't grasp you.

Where are you? My handsome Beloved!
You are close by me, my dear Beloved!
You are close by, yet I yearn to meet you!
I can bear these pangs!
No, I can't.

Such Nights

Essian Ratan

Night of the full moon
Bright light flooding through
My satiny white terrace
I am lying on my bed
With my eyes closed –
We have our tender union.
My lotus-heart and you
You, you, you!
My mind free of anxiety
Rapt in embracing you, you, only you!
My Beloved! My Beloved!
Do give me such nights, won't you!

Misery and Pain Down The Memory Lane

Dukh Andoh Gae Sabh Bhul

Misery and pain
 Struck me again and again
Wings of hope could not take off
 Lamps of my heart lay in utter dark.
How could their light return?
 A withered flower bloom again?
'My Beloved! Beloved mine!'
 A tiny ray from you
Makes us glow –
 The dark heart begins to sparkle
As though you entered yourself –
 Misery and pain are forgotten
Musical melodies burst forth
 Lips vibrate 'Beloved! Beloved!'

At the Still Point

Ruk Jaye Kal Chal

All suffering goes away

No worry comes close,

My mind is stretched clear

With the pull of your love.

Nights belong to me

And days do not go astray,

Breathing is calm

Unruffled by craving, my love!

'Beloved! Beloved!'

Is my only chant

In musical rhythms

It harmoniously flows.

In my rapt embrace

You are sitting, my Love!

Time and flux come to a stop

I get my gift, the refuge of your lap!

Love for the Ephemeral

Binashar Da Prem

My Beloved!

When we get fixed on things we look at,

When we long for them,

When we are seduced by beauty

Other than yours,

When we emotionally invest in

Other sorrows and desires,

We ache as they flee,

For, they are ephemeral.

Wedded

Larh Laggi

My desires have not yet ceased,
'Me! Me!' has not yet paused,
'Mine! Mine!' hovers behind,
Thus I am betrothed to you –
Wedded to your Name.
'Beloved' 'Beloved' I scream
'Yours' 'I am Yours' I plead
'Come meet' 'Come meet" I wail;
I call out loud again and again:
Beloved, please overlook my failings.

For the sake of your infinite virtues,
Extend your passion to this lover,
O compassionate One!
Look at the ocean with its virtues,
They are yours, your own, my Beloved.

Unflinching Eyes

Attik Nain

I spent the night in agony,
I waited and wept,
Wailing, 'Beloved' 'Beloved'
Counting every minute.
At the break of dawn you came, but
Misfortune has its mysterious ways,
The eyes that waited unflinching all night
Had relaxed for a moment.

How to go Across?

Dur Kinj Hoe Duri?

When the lover was away

I'd say, 'please come,'

But when the lover came,

I went away.

O fortune-teller – quick!

Send me some tips

How do I cross this distance?

How do I dwell in my lover's presence?

Mashobra – In Autumn

Mashobra – Khiza Vicc

My brother Mashobra! Now tell me,
Weren't you that spectacular blossom –
Who was rejoicing like flowers?
Whose grass was luscious green?
Now that grass lies pale,
It looks so very sad!
Your flowers are wilting –
They stand sadly with their heads down,
They shrivel and wither in pain!
Like a mother apart from her offspring,
They that bear fruit are fruitless,
Laying bare the agony of separation!
Leaves too have changed their colours,
They fall off with the touch of breeze.

Winter-Sun in Mashobra

Mashobre Di Sial-Dhup

After hugging the snow clad mountains
A gentle breeze is sweeping through
Freezing cold, it sends out its chills
But stays silent and serene.

Sunshine squeezes out that chill!
Sliding quickly from the sun clad skies
She wraps all those shivering on her lap
With a mother's love and coziness.

A free and vast expanse
Pours from the celestial world –
Pure silence, silence, silence!
This halo of my Beloved
Overflows with fragrant joy –
Ever serene and beautiful!

Eyes close, and inward they go,
My face begins to face itself,
I now so easily enter
The land of my infinite Beloved.

Hands to Work, Voice to Recite

Hath Kar Vall, Rasna Uchar Vall

From: distance comes a sound:

Thatt tharar tharar
Thatt tharar tharar

*** *** ***

you, you, you, you
Thatt tharar tharar
Thatt tharar tharar
Thatt you tharar
Thatt you tharar

*** *** ***

Hearing it one friend says to the other:

What is this *kharar kharar*?
Along with 'you,' this *tharar tharar*?

Her friend responds:

The world is so topsy-turvy
Things come together in strange ways!

Former friend:

Let us go friend,
Let us go see
Those mysteries.

Latter friend:

The place seems a bit far,
But if you want, let us depart.

Both begin to walk. Approaching the place where the sound was coming from, the former friend:

Oh good women!
Wise and beautiful!
What are you doing? And
What are you singing?

With an axe in her hand, a stone cutter:
We are cutting rocks and stones,
They turn to pebbles with each pound of our ax.

The second friend (quickly):
But what do you recite as you pound?
It sounds like 'you' over and again.

The other stonecutter:
Yes, we sing our song of 'you'
'You, you,' and, 'you alone.'

The former friend:
But who is this 'you' you address?

The stonecutter:
That One who hides in the cave of our heart,
– That One who sits listening to our songs.
You may think we are making a racket,
But we are soothed by these sounds.
Our Beloved rejoices in our songs,
And annuls all our misgivings.

That sound struck again:
Thatt tharar thatt tharar
Thatt tharar thatt tharar
'Hai tun hai tun hovanhar
hai tun hai tun hovanhar.'

The first friend:
Wait a bit my sister!
Tell us something else:

¹ Tilang Mahalla5, Guru Granth, p. 724.

Cosmic Symphony

Why do you perform them together?
Surely, you must get tired.

A wise stonecutter:

We cut stones, we earn money – with which
We eat sweetened bread at night
So we rest and fuel our body.
But the ‘you’ fills our deepest needs
It quickly wears off all other fatigue
We gain a force that never leaves.

The second friend:

Your two jobs chime together like silver anklets
How did you get into this habit?

The wise stonecutter:

A holy man walked by one day,
He was sad seeing us work so hard.
‘Come listen to me,’ he said to us,
‘Let us think about your tired body and vacant heart.
You can fill your stomach with food
But the void in your heart?
It’s a blessing to work with your two hands –
I hear you pronounce “wonder” as you labour hard;
This lonely sound will feed your stomach,
Let us now remedy the hollow in your heart.’
He then sat amidst us, and
Taking up our work of breaking stones,
Broke into a mesmerising rhythm –
‘You are, you are, you’ll always be,
You are, you are, you’ll always be.’
‘Only you, only you, only you, only you,
You only to you only I offer myself ...’
He was cutting stones and singing along,
His face was all smiles, his eyes were ablaze.
That fiery bliss in his eyes
We still remember vividly.

One of the friends:

When you just cut stone,
Without calling for 'you,'
What do you feel?

The wise stonecutter:

The labour makes us physically ache
We feel worn-out and jaded
When we don't sing of our handsome one,
The situation turns like before:
Loneliness invades our inner space
All we feel is empty and desolate;
With 'you' going away,
Out happiness is wiped away.

The second friend:

Have you seen with your own eyes
The One you so amorously recite?

The wise stonecutter:

Our holy man explained to us –
'You' is the Beloved of the universe;
That One's form is 'you,' sheer 'you'
That One's song is 'you,' sheer 'you.'

Suddenly all the women in a melodious chorus:

You are you are you'll always be
You are you are you'll always be.

Thatt tharar tharar

Thatt tharar tharar

Your Magical Wonders

Tere Chojan Di Chal

My handsome beloved!
Your magical wonders
Make me ecstatic forever.
You perform your magic in my interior
At times behind my dark recesses
At times in your own light –
– Your dazzling light –
Playing hide and seek with my heart.

But today,
Yes my Beloved, today,
What wonders did you perform?
At the break of dawn,
You soared far away into the skies –
Farther and farther
Farther than the farthest
Your infinite light spread all over
Flooding colours across the horizon!
I am seduced by the sparkle
That exposes your transcendent body.

*** *** ***

Wonderful your feats, my Love!
Wonderful your delights, my Beloved!
Closer than the closest, farther than the farthest –
You are far away but extremely close
You captivate us however you please
Your wonders are sheer magic.

Curdled Bit

Chiddi

Question:

Who are you lady?

Answer:

I am born of milk, but I am not yogurt.
I am born of milk, but I am not cream.
I am born of milk, but I am not butter.
I am born of milk, but I am not buttermilk.

Question:

Then who are you lady?

Answer:

With hands behind your ears,
Listen to me carefully, O brother:
I am *chiddi*, a curdled bit, a curdled bit.

Question:

Then lady, you must be good for nothing?

Answer:

No brother! Don't say this!
A woman who rubs me on her hands,
I make them soft like a petal
So they delicately caress her lover.
Listen O brother!
A woman who rubs me on her face,
Her lover's eyes ceaselessly chase
In rapture that takes him beside himself.
Our Beloved has endowed us with honour
Has given worth to us unworthy slips,
Yes,
We are divinely gifted curdled bits.

Exchange of Hearts

Dil Vatandra

Your radiance shoots arrows at my heart
No, my dear, I should say love abides in my eyes
Will your eyes carry away the flow of my love?
No my dear, no, let them irrigate my inner recesses.
Let your love flow in me, I promise
I will hold its tenderness securely in my castle.
How can eyes reach that interior space?
How can I have a vision of that handsome one?
I have heard it is impossible to get there!
So help me find a way my friends.
A heart can only chime with another heart!
We get by giving ours – this is the name of love
When we give some of our heart away
We are left with even more! There is no other way!
This we call the exchange of hearts, my dear
One heart is shared by the lover and the beloved
One heart – one body is the ancient way
So let our double hearts unite in my body.

I Am Getting My Oars

Mere Chappe Lagg Rahe Han

I am getting my oars ready

My boat is going across a crystal breast,
Softly, smoothly, rhythmically.

The sun has set

I will get the oars, my boat is gliding along
Where to though?

Evening is here, the boat is still going,

The rippling waters
Are saying
Go go, go go.

It is dark

I see lamps flicker in the distance
I am getting the oars, the boat is going, ...
On and on
Going where, O Giver?

Stars ascended the skies and descended into the waters

A gentle breeze sweeps over
Twinkling mirrors play in the waters
Oblivious of my boat.
I am getting my oars, the boat is still going
On and on
Going where, O Giver?

No moon, no sun, there is no lamp in my boat!

I find no row, no street, no road
On this crystalline breast.
The oars I have are naïve
Waters alone are sliding my boat
As it is moving along
Stars I feel are fading farther away.
Waters are cold, undulating; there is a nip in the air
It hugs me still, but my hands are getting cold.

Cosmic Symphony

On and on, where am I going, O Giver?
Night has loosened its grip, stars are hanging over,
My boat is slip sliding
Waters kiss my oars and say,
Go, go, go.
Tell me O Giver, where to?

Keru Mountain

Keru Paharh

I made my home in the cave of contentment
 Located near Keru Mountain, when
Seismic and thundering rocks
 Violently shook my meditation spot
Barely would a roar fade from one
 When others would come tearing down.
Our strength and our fragility
 You alone know, O almighty One!

Entirely My Beloved's

Sainyan Di Sari

Off went my spinning bodkin
 Off went my spinning basket
Slipped away my spinning wheel
 No more of my spinning group
No more dancing, hopping or games
 When my Beloved winked at me
My eyes sewed to his like fish on a line
 I became my Beloved's – I am entirely his!

Blurry

Jhanwla

In the dark distance I don't see much:
It seems blurry to me, so let blurry it be
I find myself aligned with it
That blurriness has rapt me.

I am calling out frantically towards it –
I hope a hint of my cry reaches your ears
It seems you don't hear me nor speak to me
And yet my ears tend to hear
'You are not not speaking either!'

You speak the ineffable, like the language of the stars
Their brilliance suffices, so let it just be your light!
The delicate string of love is pulling at my heart,
What do I do with my little romance?

Do fulfill my raw desire my Beloved
You inflamed it, you are drawing me on!

Heart's Desire

Dil Saddhar

When I see 'idol worship'
I begin to wish
That you were behind my
every single fibre.

*** *** ***

My enchantment does not fade
with my passing years
Farther than the farthest
you are unfathomable, my Love!

Come for a blink of an eye
let me see you just once
Fulfil their desire
before these eyes turn to dust
Let them have a glimpse of you
My Love –
take me in your arms
– just once!

Tremors of Love

Pyar-Tarban

O *veena* player,
 Come play your *veena*
Come here,
 Stir some of its sleeping chords.
Its strings of love
 Are lying loose
Come over
 Stretch them tight.
O itals *veena* rlayes,
Instill some life
 In this dead heart
Stir it so
 That it begins to beat
Start up
 Some songs of love –
Songs that will
 Pierce my heart
I will bring out trays of pearls
I will pile your lap with riches.

All of a Sudden

Chan Achkian

O drummer, beating your drums,
 Play the tune of meeting with our Love.
Strike a melody so intense,
 That it will uproot all my pain.
No don't unfold anything sad,
 Just play rhythms of joy
With the beating of your drum
 May my Beloved suddenly come!
I'll fill your empty lap to the brim –
 As soon as I hear 'Beloved is here!'

Again and Again I Return

Murh Murh Phere Pandian

Like an ocean wave returns

 Kissing the shores again and again,

I return to the threshold of your vision,

 My lips kissing it again and again.

You don't get tired, nor does the shore,

 This quality has struck me so!

Whereas the shore can become rough

 Your feet remain ever calm,

They bear my incessant kisses

 And with each one I rejoice;

Your never-ending patience

 Brings me back again and again.

Lines of Love-Sickness

Birhon Lekh

- O astrologer! Quickly check my horoscope –
 How many lines of love-sickness are there?
O fortune-teller! Tell me my fortune –
 When will my Beloved come home to me?
O yogi! Look into the unknown –
 When will my love-sickness go away?
O ascetic! Wandering around –
 Erase these lines of love-sickness in my palm!
O saint! Strike some nail that will
 Drive away love-sickness from my fate!

*** *** ***

Nobody hears my cries of pain
 Nobody helps me in my hour of need
I am exhausted from going around
 Searching for your greetings and messages.
Now I live with only one hope:
 I ardently wait to see you.
With the passing of years it is getting harder
 I have no more patience left over –
Now come on your own, my handsome one
 Don't delay a moment more, my Love!
You are my wish, you the meeting-point,
 To you I make my endearing requests.

Your Nest

Tera Ashiyana

From garden to garden
Nature went asking: 'Tell me nightingale,
Is there a garden you find befitting yourself?
Let me know, for I will make it
Into a nest, for you to rest.'

Somewhat startled but with a smile she said,
 'What is fitting for me, I do not know;
Whichever garden I made my home,
 I have been forced to fly away.
So please hear my wish my friend:
 Any place wafting with my beloved
 Any place coloured with my beloved
 Make my nest in that garden
 I'll live in its branches, singing my songs.'

Pull

Khicch

You made the law:

 'the bigger pulls the smaller.'

The sun pulls the earth,

 the earth the moon,

And the moon,

 the leaping waves.

Gather us in yourself,

 the greater of the greatest!

Keep us drawn to you,

 the greater of the greatest!

Without your pull my Beloved,

We'll be lost – scattered shrubs in a forest!

Don't Walk Away

Tur Jao na

When you come over, my love,
 You completely take over me.
When you don't come,
 I writhe in pain.
When you visit my mind,
 Then I long to be with you –
Like the waves of the ocean,
 I'm an incessant tide and ebb.
When you walk away,
 Then I beg and beseech you,
I try to latch on to things
 To make my time pass.
When you smile, my heart slips.
 Into your vibrant colours, my Beloved!
Seeing you see me in your slippery silence,
 My life wriggles in joyous pain.
No form, no colour,
 You have no trace, no living trait!
'Don't walk away' 'don't walk away'
 From my deepest depths, I call for you.

Invisible Camel

Ojal Dachi

O transcendent One!

Take on form so you can caress us,

Or, make us transcendent

So that we may see your formless form;

I wave my arms – like Sassi awaiting

The invisible camel aloft with her lover!

Day and night I call for you,

Come my Beloved, come over!

Don't Hide

Na Chappia Kar

You are always hidden –
Yes, you, who hide yourself!
Keep hiding,
Keep hiding,
With our hearts rejoicing, keep hiding!
But tell your love
Not to hide itself:
When your love hides,
Night engulfs the world,
The cosmos revolves in darkness.
O you, who hide yourself!

Writhing

Tarfan

I

Taking off from the mountains
Hugging the valleys
Trailing through the desert sands
Reached the shore
And stood by the beautiful sea.

*** *** ***

The sun was beginning to bathe
In the far western side of the sea.
I was shocked –
To see the waves fall
Yes, so close to me,
To see them writhing in pain
So near my eyes.

I asked them, alas!
From where did you get this pain?
Or was it my touch –
That made you writhe such?

‘Whish, Whish!’ bellowed the waves
They surged so high and crashed down
Rolling around in agony
Calling out louder and louder.
Amidst those deafening groans,
Who could hear my call?

At that moment I beseeched the sun:
O bright brother! Brother dear!
These waves are writhing

When did it all start? What is the cause?
When will it all end, dear brother?

Sun – I am the culprit, listen my lady!
I was the one to seduce them –
They leap high yearning to meet me!
Ah, the poor things cannot reach
There lies a big gap between us
Our distance makes their lovesickness worse.

I – But handsome brother,
You are caressing their writhing wrists, look –
How you enter their transparent selves!
You are so intimate with these waves
Where is the distance you claim
To be the cause of their pain?

Sun – You are standing there good lady,
You can see me here,
But I am just as far as you
There exists an equal distance –
Between the sea and me
Yes, a vast vast expanse separates
These writhing waves from me!
Your eyes are disillusioned, my lady,
They show you something other than reality.

I – Why this suffering, Sun! Why?
Who fashioned these towering surges?
Why some writhe in pain
While another shines in light? Ah!

Sun – I am to pull, dear lady,
Yes this is my decree from our primal source!
That the waves be pulled, this too
Has come from that primordial source, me lady!

I – Who created this torturous pull?

Sun – The One who pulls us all!
That One has made it so that the waves
Are pulled up with desire and then fall;
The writhing written on their foreheads
Is set in your heart as well.
Between your aching sighs there may be
Some of our royal life's mysteries!
By bearing it, my beautiful lady, perhaps
Hidden enigmas can be revealed
So endure as much as you can –
Your writhing could unfurl life's mysteries.

Reality

Asliat

O reality of 'Me' and 'Mine!'
Part from them for a while at least;
Strip off your outer clothes,
Wear your intrinsic colours.
Who knows your pure lustre
May allure that Real One!
And if you are embraced,
Never ever escape!

Request

Ardas

(Of the drop of water dangling
on the edge of a *pipal*-leaf by the ocean)

O ocean! Our mighty ocean!
Our splendidly sparkling ocean!
Here I am dangling from this *pipal*-leaf,
How do I embrace you? O jewelled ocean!
If I try to jump in, I'll dissolve in the sand,
And I know not how to fly.
Leap up and absorb this drop,
O compassionate One!

Amorphous Rock

Bitthun Patthar

A rock was lying around
Amorphous, it had no form.
A sculptor glanced upon it
And saw in it its shape,
He saw too the useless mass
Concealing its distinct image.
With a chisel in one hand,
In the other a mallet,
Chipping away the superfluous,
He carved out –
Look a perfect picture –
From that formless, amorphous rock.

Similarly
My intrinsic self is formless
Amorphous like a rock;
But my Beloved,
Carve in it your own image.
With the beat of your mallet,
– Chisel it away.

*** *** ***

It hurts me
I sigh in pain
I don't see Beloved the love
With which you are sculpting your form!
My mind is an amorphous rock –
Beat away all that is extrinsic
Let me feel your exciting image
Take shape in me.

Cosmic Symphony

*** *** ***

My Beloved! You are an artist,
Your art is full of compassion;
Sharpen our aesthetic vision,
Chisel away our dullness.

Diamond-Speck

Heera-Kani

A diamond fell from the skies
 Shattering into tiny specks;
But each speck is a diamond,
 It is its intrinsic self nevertheless.
The jewellers who can assess,
 Set them in exquisite patterns of gold;
But idiots do not know their worth,
 They trample them into The dust.

Guess Who?

Bujho Eh Kaun?

Oil lamps dried out after shining all night
Even their wicks wore out after burning all night
The tears that were flowing like melting wax
They too dried out my Beloved!
Above the dark clouds engulfed us in pitch darkness
Even so my eyes continued to look out the gate,
Ah! My Lover sneaked in the backdoor,
Covering my eyes asked,— ‘Guess who?’

Unmusical Music

An-Sangeetak Sangeet

My melodies are out of tune,
 O my musically refined Beloved!
How can you enjoy my music?
I am amazed to see you
At the break of dawn
 Enter my hut and secretly sit down –
Listening to my discordant song!
How you are rapt in music so unmusical!

Instant Flash

Acchan Ceti Da Jhalka

The ball of cotton
 Slipped through my hand
The revolving spinning-wheel
 came to a halt
The moon from the skies
 stood beside
I could not make out the figure! But
The sparkle in my eyes
 shimmered,
The fire of my life
 lighted up,
Should I merge in
 or enjoy the sight?
Wave upon wave fiercely made its way!

Wild Berries

Kokan Ber

Wonderful are these tiny shrubs

Growing on their own beside my hut!

Wonderful are their wild berries!

Wonderful are your marvels my Beloved!

Who knows you may come today

Yes, refusing pears and apples

Yes, refusing a feast of apple berries

Refusing as well succulent berries

Round and plump and juicy and red

And all those shiny black berries

That yearn to be savoured by you!

Yes My Beloved, my handsome beloved!

You have arrived at my paltry home saying,

'I am hungry, I am hungry

Bring some wild berries growing beside your hut.'

*** *** ***

Trembling, quivering, rejoicing, but shy

I picked some berries –

I was about to rinse them quickly, and

Place them on *arabi*² leaves

In front of my Beloved

As my humble gift –

A gift that actually had been asked for.

But my Beloved rushed in

And snatched them while I was rinsing

– Like a child snatches fig-candy from the mother's hand!

My Beloved ate them all, one by one relishing each berry

Wonderful my Beloved! Wonderful! I whirl in ecstasy!

¹ *Arabi/aravi* is a root from the calocasia plant, and Punjabis prepare a vegetable dish from it.

Cosmic Symphony

*** *** ***

Ah! Now

Listen to me my inner eyes! I make one request:

Don't be rushed like my outer eyes;

Oh please don't be in a hurry

Treasure the image of my Lover forever.

And you, my outer eyes,

Let your tears flow!

You deserve so!

Your haste was the cause of our parting.

From Beauty Into Beauty

Sundarta Ton Sundarta Vic

Like the rose bush blossoms
 When it looks at you
 Rejoicing
 I creep towards your door
Intoxicated by your floating fragrance
 I sway from side to side
Your touch sends tremors in me
 Each fibre becomes a billowy wave
I lose into my own self
 Enveloped by somebody there
Mysterious strokes of somebody handsome
 Sweep through me
In that flood of passion
 From somewhere somebody says 'I'
Tell me now
 Could this be my Beloved?

Rapturous Hint

Sukh Sainat

Today a rapturous hint came from the skies –
‘You are loved by your Beloved
The same Beloved, the very same one
Who you have adored mind and body.’
I am inebriated
The sonorous intimation
 fills me with rapture
In gratitude
 tears flood my eyes
I cry wildly
I cry wildly
Tharar tharar thar tharar tremors shoot
Bursting waves ripple through
I am lost
I am lost!
Even at this moment that lovely memory
Sways me in rapturous colours
Wonderful my Beloved!
Wonderful my Beloved!

Flow of a Still Heart

Dhara Dil Tike Vali

O still heart! You are the Ganges,
O stillness in perpetual motion!
You are a magical flow,
A truly magical flow!

O cool flowing Ganges
O ambrosial flow
Your form is divine
Indeed, divine!

Your flow is invisible
Your cool so invigorating
Your transparency reveals your source
In your form you are formless.

Fortunate are they O friends,
Who bathe in this Ganges;
And they who sip its waters,
Are supreme aesthetes on earth.

Go on flowing, O Ganges
Go on gifting us with your sacred dips
O embodiment of purity,
Go on endowing us with your qualities.

By envisioning you and immersing in you,
We soothe our mind and body;
You give birth to luscious gardens,
Your magical touch is like a philosopher's stone.

Cosmic Symphony

That you descend from the skies
And flow in the soil of our hearts
O Ganges is truly magical!
You are a marvel, a marvel you are!

Aura of Your Visit

Phera Pa Jan Di Prabha

Glancing away, I went up the stairway
Sneaking my way to the top of the roof.

The skies were still so far away,

I stared at them

And started to call out loud:

My Beloved! My Beloved!

My eyes just froze

Heavy, they could hold no more.

*** *** ***

I was in somebody's arms!

My eyes opened wide with the shock

Ah, this was but the balmy breeze

Calming me inside out.

I called out even louder

My Beloved! My Beloved!

I did not want that world to hear

So I left it far below

Yes, you are now nearer than before

I want my voice to reach your ears –

My beloved! My beloved!

*** *** ***

The moon ascended the skies

But its light dipped down,

I was getting inebriated

I felt somebody's lips on my forehead.

My eyes opened wide with the shock

Who was kissing my forehead?

You! Was it you? No

Cosmic Symphony

It was the moonlight
Kissing my forehead.

*** *** ***

I said: My mind! Don't be forgetful,
Keep on calling, go on, call,
 Enjoy yourself but don't forget to call,
 O mind, your Beloved is hearing you
 That tender heart hears
 Your forlorn calls.

*** *** ***

Again I was shocked:
 Who did I hear? 'Your Beloved
 Is coming, O your own Beloved;'
 Is it so?
 Who did I hear it from?
 Don't know, but I heard it for sure
 Yes, otherwise too, it is getting late
 The Beloved may be on the way now.
My mind! Quick, make preparations for the welcome
What if the Beloved arrives and you are not even ready?

*** *** ***

I polished the platter clean
Poured oil in the four-lipped lamp
Placed four cotton wicks at each end.
I then put upright an incense stick
With sandal-paste powder beside it
Matches were set by my finger-tips
So
As soon as I'd hear the footstep
 I would light up the lamps
And immediately start with my *arati*.
I'd garland my beloved,
Place my head at his feet,
I'd circle my platter around his face.

Mere Sainyan Jio

*** *** ***

Dewdrops are sprinkling
Darkness is softly departing
A delicate mist sheens my eyes –
Dripping in joy
They are about to shut.

*** *** ***

I am shocked yet again, but why?
Why am I taken aback?
My eyes open up wider still
It is getting colder, and my joy more intense,
My mind is intoxicated, my eyes are moist,
My entire self is a fount of joy
O mind, quickly! Get ready for the *arati*- welcome:
The fount of joy within
Is a sure sign –
My Beloved is on the way.

*** *** ***

Instantly I took out the match
I ignited a flame
So
 To light up the lamps and burn the incense
 And to prepare the sandalwood paste.

*** *** ***

[stunned]
What!
 What! What happened Love!
 I lost the garland I made for you.
 Who could have taken it away?
What!
 Incense? It is already smothered to ash
 The lamps have devoured all the oil
 They lie asleep in black soot.
What!
 Sandalpaste and camphor,

Cosmic Symphony

Both took off on their own.
Perfumes and scents have flown.
The entire *arati*-welcome is over!

All done?

Finished without my even getting started?

Really, my Beloved Love!
Is my worship all finished?
Who came and what was done?
The door to the roof is still locked,
Except you who could have come from
Below or above or in between?
Alas in a blink of the eye
Within the tiny tremor of my eye
You came: the *arati* worship itself
Performed auspiciously on its own!
You came and disappeared
In just a flash.
How I pined for you all the while
And you came and stole away!
Wonder of Wonders,
How you played your magic!

*** *** ***

My Beloved! Your *arati*?

Who performed it?	How?
The garland was put around the neck!	How?
The propitious mark received on the forehead!	How?
The fragrances wafted into air!	How?
The camphor offered itself!	How?

*** *** ***

My Beloved!
When I touch my forehead
The glowing dust from your feet
I can feel it still sticking to me.

What! Look!

My forehead has received
The touch of your feet.
How did my head rest

Mere Sainyan Jio

At your endearing feet?

I did not bow,

So who did it?

What? It bowed itself? How?

Wonderful giver! This rapture, this intensity, peace, joy, excitement,

This love, delicate fragrance, this magical colour,

Is it a brilliant aura of your circular visit?

From your touch, air and skies,

My inner constellation, have derived this joy?

This ecstasy of ecstasies!

Wonder of wonders!

You slipped away.

You came and went away!

*** *** ***

My Beloved! I call for you yet again,

Don't be angry, my tender hearted love!

This cry is but my winged flight.

I had said, today I'd be greeting you with my *arati*,

You came showering your infinite gifts,

But you slipped away in an instant

I wish you'd touched me so

I'd lose all

My craving and cognition.

You stole away

Stealing behind even the veil of time

Ecstasy is left in this scarf of mine

'O wondrous form! Wondrous trsm!'

Sheer ecstasy, ecstasy, ecstasy!

The Ambrosial Cup

Nam Pyala

The cup of the beautiful Word
 Is overflowing O friends!
Who will have a sip of it?
 Keep watching, O friends.
She whose own cup
 Is brimming with desire,
She alone will receive it, but
 Hold on to this secret.